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ABSTRACT

This monograph attempts to explore and explain communication between different racial groups within the scope of existing communication theory. The question of race and culture as variables in effective verbal interaction is again raised. No solutions are presented but basic problems are pointed out. An account of some characteristics of transracial communication in the attempt to understand the constraints and pressures of interracial communication is given. Concepts such as ethnic groups, recurring linkages, structurization, and normalization are used. (Author/JW)

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TOWARD TRANSRACIAL COMMUNICATION

Arthur L. Smith, Jr.

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Afro-American Studies Center Publication Activities

The Center sponsors the Journal of Black Studies, an interdisciplinary scholarly quarterly devoted to articles dealing with people of African descent.

In addition to the Journal, the Center publishes occasional monographs on a broad range of topics related to Black Americans and interracial relations. "Toward Transracial Communication" by Professor Arthur L. Smith, Jr., is the first in a series of papers to be published by the Center.

Professor Smith is Director of the Afro-American Studies Center at UCLA. He also teaches in the Speech Department and is an expert on interracial communication and black rhetoric. His published works include Rhetoric of Black Revolution, Rhetoric of Revolution, and Voice of Black Rhetoric. He is currently writing two additional books on contemporary speech communication.

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Introduction

This monograph attempts to explore and explain communication between different racial groups within the scope of existing communication theory. Our approach allows us to discuss transracial communication in terms which are familiar to students and scholars of human communication. What is unique, however, is the emphasis on communication within transracial contexts. Such a discussion seeks to add to our knowledge of interpersonal communication by examining the constraints and pressures existing in transracial verbal interaction.

The reader may, of course, question whether the constraints and pressures of interpersonal communication within transracial contexts are not applicable much more generally to all forms of human communication. But while the components of the communication process remain the same, the strictures upon that process differs in transracial situations as opposed to intra-racial situations. What we are talking about here is a concentrated effort to explore the process of communication as it occurs not between people of the same race but between different racial groups. In so doing the whole question of race and culture as variables in effective verbal interaction is asked once more. The reader might want to reflect on his own attempts to communicate with members of another race. Occasionally, we do well and at other times there seem to be barriers betwixt us and the other fellow. Although this condition may and does arise in intra-racial communication, it is never so sharp as in interracial contexts.

Since little has been done in this area up to now, it would be presumptuous indeed to claim that this small monograph is definitive. Nor can it be claimed that we have identified through a heuristic development every possible direction for this area of study. Transracial communication is an exciting field, if for no other reason than that it offers hope for human problems. But this is not to suggest that we have provided the single panacea for difficulties which have troubled societies for years on end. We have not presented the solution. We have only begun to see clearly what the basic problems are, but that sight has led us to make some careful notations about interpersonal communication within transracial contexts. Now that our area of responsibility has been established, let it be said that we have attempted to contribute to the literature on interracial communication. Whether we have been successful or not remains to be seen, but we have put forth our ideas with good faith. And the reader will find in this discussion an account of some characteristics of transracial communication which the author has found worthy of consideration as we seek to understand the constraints and pressures of interracial communication.

Actually transracial difficulties have seldom been explored in terms of fundamental communication problems which might be avoided by effectively manipulating symbols and signs. Too often when persons of different ethnic backgrounds have problems relating to each other they resort to "attack" words and name-calling. Aiming at the other person's character, intelligence or integrity. The disgruntled blames the difficulty in communication on the other person's dishonesty or stupidity. In a number of cases involving blacks and whites this can be seen with unusual clarity.

While blacks and whites living in America have many common experiences, values and aspirations, there are numerous instances where communication lags because of misunderstandings.

In a small integrated tool company the co-owners, one white and one black, had been trying to increase the efficiency of their company. Observing that one of the workers had been slacking off for several days the owners warned him that if he did not start concentrating on his work, he would be fired. One day the white co-owner found the worker sleeping on the job. He summarily dismissed him. The worker appealed to the black co-owner, telling him that he was behind in his home mortgage and had taken on an extra job to avoid foreclosure and that if he lost his job at the tool company he would lose his home and not be able to support his wife and six children. The owners discussed the situation, the white owner arguing that they needed to maintain efficient operations and the black one sympathizing with the worker's problems. They finally decided to loan him the money at low interest so he could quit his extra job and maintain his position with the company. The above example is by no means categorical, but as we shall see these types of problems arise between blacks and whites in American society more often than we like to admit. Some will argue vigorously that the basis for this kind of difficulty is cultural, but as Edward Hall contends culture is communication.[1]

Nothing is written without the conscious or unconscious influence of others, and certainly these pages reflect my debt. Those from whom I have gained invaluable insight might also find some useful concepts and revelations in this monograph. The social psychologist, communicologist, sociologist, anthropologist, and linguistician should find some ideas with pedagogical applicability. My colleagues in the field of speech communication will sense the potentialities inherent with communication paradigms for a multi-ethnic society.

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1. Edward Hall, Silent Language. New York: Fawcett Books, 1969, p. 13.

DIRECTIONS IN TRANSRACIAL COMMUNICATION

Transracial

All analysis ends in definition; this monograph is no different. When you have completed reading the last page of it you will have experienced the author's definition of his subject. However weak the analysis, the final result speaks of the author's definition. In this sense the definitional context of a topic, subject or term might conceivably include the total treatise being written about the term as topic. Additionally, it is possible to enlarge the context to include all experiences and observations of the author and to call that the definitional context of a term. One might go even further to include the influences upon the writer, the society, the world and the universe. Generally, however, when a definition is sought for a term, we seek a more limited context. Thus, with some distillation of the macrocosmic picture we can usually hazard a relatively short and sweet definition. Transracial refers to across racial lines. To be sure, anthropologists are still not certain what is meant by race, so an additional, although not synonymous term, inter-ethnic, can be used to further zero in on our area of concern. Broadly speaking, a race may include several ethnic groupings. Therefore, inter-ethnic is not the same as transracial but it gives an additional dimension to our focus. An ethnic group is one which has shared a common heritage, history, culture; has experienced similar frustrations and anxieties; and aspires to similar goals and aims. Biologically speaking, a person may be 80 percent of one race and yet identify with an ethnic group not usually identified with his biological race. Ethnic identity, then, can be determined by both birth and choice. Although this article uses the general title, transracial communication, it is also concerned with the less broad inter-ethnic communication.

Communication

What precisely can be called "communication" has exercised numerous scholars.[2] The definition used in this study borrows from previous conceptualizations. We shall take the word communication to mean the symbolic interaction by which humans relate to each other. The symbols, verbal, gestural or pictorial, act as

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2. George Lundberg, Foundations of Sociology. New York: Macmillan Co., 1939, p. 253. Edward Sapir, "Communication," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. New York: Macmillan Co., 1933, p. 795. Theodore Newcomb, Personality and Social Change. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Co., 1957, pp. 288-290.

stimuli to evoke behavior in another person. In addition, communication may include what Sapir called the unconscious assimilation of the ideas and behavior of one's culture.[3] Thus, with the awareness of cultural influences an added dimension is provided for our discussion of transracial communication. For what our cultural context has made of us, is what we convey to others. When someone acquires an impression of another, something is being communicated. The question of intention, that is, whether communication is classified as "explicit" and "implicit" or as "indirect" and "direct," must be viewed in the light of humans relating to each other. In other words, there are instances when we are influenced by stimuli not meant to influence us. And yet, because we are uniquely equipped to respond to certain kinds of stimuli, there is a natural reaction to those stimuli when they occur with propinquity. We relate as human beings to other human beings through symbolic interaction whether the stimulus is intended or unintended. Thus, while our analysis of transracial communication is primarily concerned with the conscious efforts of communicators, unconscious stimuli and responses will often come under our purview.

Process

The process of communication involves initiators, messages and medium in dynamic interaction. Initiators may be catoregorized as primary and secondary. The primary initiator corresponds to the source and encoder in models; the secondary initiator corresponds to the receiver and decoder in the same models. The term initiator suggests that all participants in communication provoke reaction and response, even if the reaction is simply to ignore the other person. Dynamic interaction is more than linkage between two or more persons in communication; it refers to linkage in a particular way. Linkage can be a neutral term, but dynamic interaction suggests recurring linkages. In other words, to interact is more than mere connection, as linkage might suggest to some, but is the constant process to secure connection between communicators. To say process to secure connection is to deal with the fact that interaction is not static or linear but involves periods of linkage and periods of non-linkage. It is recurring linkage, and as such, dynamic interaction is the process of securing connection; in fact, it is a continuous attempt to establish linkage. So to speak of interaction simply as linkage is to misrepresent the communicative event.

Confrontation between human beings is by nature, dynamic. Of course, the degree of involvement, action, and drama depend

3. Sapir: "Communication," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, passim.

in large part upon predispositional initiators and situational contingencies. But because people are dynamic when in the company of other people, it is easy for us to understand how all participants in a communicative event can be called initiators. And the role of primary or secondary initiator alternates between participants.

Structurization

The structured content produced by an initiator is called the message. Consisting of symbols and signs which must be mutually understandable by all communicators, the message provides the meaning for the dynamic interaction. Fearing has observed that structurization of the stimulus field may be either simple or complex and in the spatial or temporal dimensions or both.[4] Messages come in many forms, however; the verbal message in interpersonal communication within transracial contexts tends to be structurally simple interchanges. This is not to say that the messages are never complex; indeed, they are, and because of this complexity, transracial communication can often be even more difficult than usual.

Two communication models may be useful in this respect.[5] Barnlund proposed a transactional model which postulates, among other things, that communication is dynamic and continuous.[6] In this sense, it exists as a continuous condition of life which fluctuates with our needs and desires. The ceaseless seeking and occasional finding of transracial communication attests to the continuous nature of the process on both the interpersonal and societal levels. Dance develops a helical model which purports to demonstrate how communication moves upward and inward simultaneously allowing the initiator to be affected by his own past conformations as charted by the helix.[7] The structurization of transracial communication may be thought of as affecting the future behavior of the communicators inasmuch as we tend to monitor and are inclined, where possible, to minimize contradictions. Barnlund allows us to see the inner dynamics of communication while Dance's helix serves to demonstrate that the communication process is continually moving forward and yet is

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4. Franklin Fearing, "Toward a Psychological Theory of Human Communication," Journal of Personality 22, 1953: p. 73.

5. See Dean C. Barnlund, "A Transactional Model of Communication," pp. 83-102 and Frank E. X. Dance, "A Helical Model of Communication," pp. 103-107 in Kenneth K. Sereno and C. David Mortensen, Foundations of Communication Theory. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

6. Barnlund, op. cit.

7. Dance, op. cit.

always to some degree dependent upon the past, which informs the present and the future. Both models have relevance to transracial communication as transaction or process, but like other communication models fail to comprehend the possibility of an inter-ethnic or transracial dimension to the process.[8] My assumption is not that these models are not correct, or that they do not work, but that they are incomplete and tell us nothing about the constraints of interpersonal communication across racial ines. It is as if the model-makers had conceived of an everywhere homogeneous situation. Furthermore, the structural integrity of the models is not under question, but their insensitivity to the demands of situational pluralism.

What is apparent is that transracial communication lacks sufficient diagrammatical model for adequate picturing of the complexities of the transaction between persons of different ethnic backgrounds. Barnlund has spoken of the model's value as the ease with which it handles a multitude of variables and relates their effects upon each other in highly complicated ways, thus preserving the integrity of events under study.[9] Equally as important is the heuristic advantage of the model which points the way, with great transparency, to new formulations, theoretical approaches and assumptions.

Purpose

Several answers could be given to the question, "What is the purpose of transracial communication anyway?" All of the answers relate to basic reasons for any kind of communication.

The first is that communicators usually want a shared meaning elicited from the secondary initiator. Both meaning and understanding are involved in this communication aim. Inasmuch as meaning is the coming together of experiences, it is aroused in the secondary initiator by provocation of the primary initiator. When another person understands our structured experiences, meaning has been aroused in him. To understand presupposes shared experience; to misunderstand is failure to share experience. The quest for communication, then, is an attempt to relate to other human beings. Harmonious human relationships are necessary for maintaining a sane society and psychical stability within the individual.

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8. The two other models which we specifically have in mind are Bruce Westley and Malcolm MacLean, Jr., "A Conceptual Model for Communicating Research," Journalism Quarterly 34, 1957: pp. 31-38, and Theodore Newcomb, "An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts," Psychological Review 60, 1953: pp. 393-404.

9. Barnlund, ibid., p. 86.

And because the hallmark of human society is shared experiences and meanings, persons unable to arouse shared meanings within others are considered abnormal. For example, occasionally a tragic mistake is rectified in a mental institution when after several years a patient, who was committed because no one could understand what he was saying at the time, is released. One affair began when after a few drinks, a Polish immigrant was picked up by the authorities of an Eastern state. Unable to understand what the man was saying, the arresting officers had him sent to the asylum. Thirty-five years later a physician who understood Polish and happened to be examining the patient discovered that the man was sane. The immigrant had finally met someone with whom he could share meaning! He was immediately released. The ability to arouse meaning in others is one indication of our worth as human beings.

Losing faith in our ability to engage in meaningful relationships with other people is tantamount to losing faith in ourselves. This is why we seek to be understood and to understand.

In transracial contexts a person unable to arouse shared meaning in one of another race over a given period of time might conceivably dismiss the other person as "out of his mind," "crazy" or with some similar expression. The folklore of the South is rich with stories of "crazy niggers" or "big bad blacks," who according to legends lived beyond the fear of whites because they were thought to be insane. Arrogant when he was supposed to be humble, forceful when he was supposed to be submissive, and violent when he was supposed to be religious, this kind of black man upset the experiences of whites. In still another sense, blacks viewing white politicians or white activists might refer to their language and action as "crazy." It is not uncommon for blacks to contend that whites "are mad" when recalling incidents involving whites and minority people. This is possible because the signs and symbols used by one group may not arouse shared meanings within another ethnic group. So, one answer to the question, "Why have transracial communication anyway?" relates to the possibility of shared meanings and experiences which make for a more orderly society.

A second answer to such a question takes its cue from the first answer. To speak of shared meanings and experiences is to say something about how humans relate to each other now and what the possibilities for more effective relationships are later. As far as transracial communication is concerned, there certainly is no lack of need for the various racial groups within a society to relate. No society can long exist with inter-ethnic conflicts and animosities which rend the fabric of national life. Therefore, to understand the nature of that conflict as expressed in symbols and signs between people of different races is to open the door for interactive effectiveness. Understanding how we relate, of course, is only one part of fulfilling our purpose. With the

understanding of the problem we must insist upon ways to correct previous behavior. In this fashion we move from where we are to where we want to be in transracial communication. It is one thing for me to analyze my failure to relate meaningfully with you through symbolic verbal interaction; it is another thing for me to correct faulty behavior for more productive interaction in the future. Thus, how we understand the person of another race and how we respond to his symbols and signs tell us something about how we relate to that individual. During this process we can also monitor our behavior in order to correct the faulty linkage.

Thirdly, transracial communication is a method of tension reduction between persons of different races. We tend to have more tension in strange interactional situations than in familiar surroundings, with friends, speaking on subjects which are mutually interesting. Race, unfortunately, can increase individual tension in the already strange setting and the capability to engage in meaningful communicative behavior with a person of another race is one way to decrease tensions. Tensions result because of anxieties, and anxieties exist when we do not know what to expect from unknown situations. Many people, operating on hearsay, old people's fables, and community customs, harbor unfounded fears which can lead to irrational behavior in transracial contexts. It is true, too, that the rabid racist may consider the ability to communicate trasracially as wasted talent. At the worst, interactional situations can degenerate into tension-creating events. Luckily such occasions do not occur often when communicators of willingness involve in verbal interaction. All human communication must begin from the acceptance of the other person's fundamental humanness. Once accomplished, the participants view each other in terms of needs and desires, and discover that they are more alike than not. Thus, a primary purpose in transracial communication centers on minimizing the inconsistencies which produce tension in interpersonal relations.

Interpersonal communication within transracial contexts reduces tension by providing us with concrete information about other people. This should not be misleading. In other words, the fact that you interacted with a person of another race should not be taken by you as an indication of your knowledge of people of that race. To judge other members of a racial or ethnic group by the one person you interacted with is another kind of prejudging. The person you met might conceivably be intelligent, articulate and magnanimous but that gives you little reason to balloon that interaction to mean more than it does. Once concrete information is experienced through interpersonal communication one might exclaim, "I never knew you were like this" or, "I had a wrong impression about you." Both these responses, while not the reactions of normal communication, indicate a basic humility needed to ease tensions. When a person is able to say, "I do not know all your perspectives, but am willing to be shown" or, "My interracial communication is a little rusty from inaction but I am

interested in meaningful interaction," then the tension reducing process is at full throttle.

Both Berlo and Miller recognized the significance of communicator's status to interpersonal communication.[10] We can assume that when persons interact face-to-face, one or the other will perceive himself as "superior to" or "more powerful than" the other person. Because there is a tendency for individuals to "size up" their counterparts, this will occur in transracial communication. Some communicators assume higher status than the person with whom they are communicating. When people come into contact with each other it is often easy for one to assume a high or low status position in relationship to the other. This is a particularly significant aspect of transracial interaction and must be viewed as an area needing understanding. This self conception vis-a-vis the other person is determined by immediate and distant influentive factors. By immediate factors are meant those social qualities initially perceived when two persons come into contact with each other. When two persons meet, each assumes a status position based in part upon the general appearance and demeanor of the other. But the status position is not entirely dependent upon appearance and demeanor, there are distant factors. By distant is meant those influences and qualities not clearly perceivable on the basis of a physical meeting; this encompasses qualities of intellect and personality which might be manifest during a communication transaction. In addition to these elements, distant factors would include those preconceived notions about the ethnic group of which the other person is a member. Thus, when two persons of different ethnic backgrounds interact they assume status positions derived from their own self-concept in combination with immediate and distant influential factors.

Impressions can often change dramatically when during conversation one of the communicators learn that the other person is of a low-status ethnic group. Even though the initial meeting may have been pleasant, the communicator with pre-conceived notions about other ethnic groups, upon learning of the other's identity may adjust his approach for the situation, in this case the person.

Several experiences will serve to illustrate the situation. A few years ago a high school teacher with most of the characteristics of a Caucasian got a position in a California high school. Because she was an excellent teacher, no one at the predominantly white school gave a second thought, at least, expressed a thought about the possibility of her having African blood. However, one day during a heated discussion on fair housing she revealed that "as a black woman I feel that we must protect the right of every person to own or rent a home anyplace he wants." Her colleagues

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10. David Berlo, The Process of Communication. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960, and George Miller, Language and Communication. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.

sat back stunned in silence; they did not expect one so close to their ranks to reveal a fact so powerful in their midst. Afterwards she was treated with great coolness, as one who had been infected with the plague. Efforts to communicate now have an additional element--she is black--and her fellow teachers began to converse with her on different bases. She became the sociologist, economist, and commentator on all black related events when heretofore she had merely given her opinion like the others. But now a special relationship developed between her and the other teachers; whatever communication occurred, it happened with this new perspective. While blacks, as well as other ethnic groups, will undoubtedly bring to the communication situation certain unique views, to accept this as a distinguishing mark of all members of an ethnic group, on every occasion, is to be grossly mistaken as to what transracial communication is about. Although it does not seek to strip anyone of his ethnicity, it does seek to normalize the communication process so that "who you are does not get in the way of what you say."

Of course, your personality and mannerisms will be a part of the communication message, but effective transracial communication minimizes the variable of race. In other examples where communicators adjust their messages as the receiver's identity emerges, the absurdity of allowing race to affect communication is underlined. When a prominent Mexican-American sought to buy a house in a Texas community, he was turned down because, "A mistake was made, we expected a Spaniard from Spain." When the Mexican-American informed the real estate agent by phone that he had just arrived in town and was interested in purchasing a house listed by the firm, the agent had agreed to show it to him. Upon arrival, the gentleman was told that a mistake had been made.

Admittedly, these examples are crude but so is the stuff of which they are made: pre-judgment of others on the basis of race or ethnicity.

CULTURE AND TRANSRACIAL COMMUNICATION

In this section we shall be concerned with the concept of culture and its relationship to communication within the transracial context. Our particular focus is with the cultural components which affect harmonious transracial communication behavior. We shall also explore the varieties of culture within American society.

A Viewpoint

One can probably find scholars who will argue any possible view of culture and with some validity. Culture, like communication, has fallen heir to a life-time of definition and redefinition by anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. The view expressed here is that culture represents the manifold ways people perceive and organize objective (and subjective) phenomena. Most usually, cultural grouping is defined as people sharing a common code, heritage, history and social organization pattern. Cultural reality is expressed in a people's institutions, proverbs, ceremonies, religion and polity, and can be identified as being separate from the culture of another people. For example, to speak of Western culture as opposed to African culture or Oriental culture is, among other things, to speak of the products of Judeo-Christian religion, Roman law and politics, and the Greek conception of beauty. Although most Western societies have evolved their own special brands of culture, the arching influence of Greek and Rome have prevailed. But culture is also a way of thinking and people living in Western society learn according to Western cultural standards and behavior patterns.

This is also true for people of non-Western origin who have been educated and indoctrinated with European ways of thinking. However, residual aspects of a non-Western person's primary cultural background may be revealed. Thus, it is not unusual to find a professional African, educated and indoctrinated with Western religious and philosophical concepts, relying upon his tribal doctors when he is sick or calling upon the Gods of Africa, "Olorun," "Bon Dieu," or "Abasi" in times of insecurity and depression. To a lesser degree, persons with no immediate past contact with the culture of their origin are often found to have a way of thinking developed within a kin-knit society of their own. Hence, Black Americans have evolved certain language as a culture within a culture within culture. Bascom and Herskovits have pointed out that despite the harsh conditions of acculturation under slavery, African religions have been able to flourish under conditions of industrialized, cosmopolitan and urban life.[11]

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11. See William Bascom and Melville Herskovits, African Cultures. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 4.

Men in all societies respond to the same realities. The perception of those realities, however, manifests itself in various manners. In fact, to say that we all react to the same concrete realities might not be exactly correct, because what one person perceives when focusing on a given phenomenon might be different from another's perception. Only in the sense that all men live in the same concrete world and must react to the same phenomenon can we say that all persons respond to the same realities.

As we shall see later, our peculiar perspectives on reality can affect transracial communication. Each person brings to the interpersonal relationship, as with other realities, a store of ideas, beliefs, habits, customs, and attitudes significantly different from those of other people. As people differ, individually and culturally, in their orientation to given realities, congruence on any phenomenon is difficult.[12] Church has argued that cultures differ in their structural homogeneity and heterogeneity. So that less technological societies tend to produce people who share the same basic assumptions about reality and more advanced societies manifest more division on basic issues without destroying the integrity of the total cultural support for this view has been expressed by Jahn in his analysis of traditional African culture.[13] He explains that in traditional African culture it is not possible to separate theology from medicine or vice versa, without violating the entire Weltanschauung. And while this is so, as more Africans come into contact with other cultures, new interpretations will emerge, giving rise to the same kind of diversity present within Western society, endangering phenomenal perceptual congruence.

Culture, above all, is what distinguishes human beings from the rest of the animal universe. Of all beings in the biological world, only man creates and uses language propositionally, possesses religion, appreciates art and manufactures instruments of construction and destruction. These are learned and shared behavior patterns and any behavior that is learned and shared is cultural, from making an arrowhead and tying one's shoelaces to believing and denying.[14] Culture, therefore, is not instinctive or biologically determined as in the case with behavior among subhuman animal forms. We learn to view phenomena as others in our group have learned; we tend to behave in given situations as we have learned from others. Indeed, the process of teaching is a form of cultural learning and sharing mediated by symbols.

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12. See Joseph Church, Language and Discovery of Reality. New York: Vintage Books, 1961, p. 138.

13. Janheinz Jahn, Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture. New York: Grove Press, 1961, passim.

14. Alfred G. Smith, Communication and Culture. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Co., 1966, p. 7.

Transracially, problems of communication are often seriously aggravated by the incongruence of cultural experiences. This is not to say that communicators must possess identical world views before they can have meaningful discussion, rather it is to argue that shared cultural influences and experiences among communicators produce more predictable results. As it would be extremely difficult for me to understand a physicist explaining the theory of relativity, not because of any lack of intelligence on either of our parts, but because of the technical language and esoteric nature of his explanation; so it is with any communicators possessing different coding systems. Of course, were I a physicist listening to a physicist, the theory of relativity might make better sense to me. Let me emphasize here that people who share similar cultural backgrounds also have communication problems. It is simply my assumption that people who have learned and shared the same culture will have a higher probability of understanding each other than if they had different code and behavior characteristics.

Our culture influences our communication patterning and helps to determine the characteristics of our structurizations. In an investigation reported by Ronald Lippitt, Ralph K. White and Kurt Lewin, experimentally created social "climates" were studied and it was discovered that human interaction was affected by cultural context.[15] In an elemental sense we can observe the effect of our own interpersonal behavior when we are with friends, strangers, or relatives. Although this type of contextual influence is not of the same mold as culture in the large, it is illustrative of the invluence of different structural characteristics of interactive situations. Lewin studied the experimentally created contexts of democratic, authoritarian, and laissez-faire situations, but the results of the experiment, like our casual observation, showed that we are creatures of context.

Demonstrative studies have been made on cultural differences and communication by several scholars. Eisenstadt investigated the communication processes among immigrants in Israel and found that some important differences existed between the structuring of the communicative function of North African and European Jews.[16] In 1958, John Bennett and Robert K. McKnight examined interpersonal relations among Japanese in America.[17]

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15. "Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created 'Social Climates,'" Journal of Social Psychology 10, 1939: pp. 271-299.

16. "Communication Processes Among Immigrants in Israel," Public Opinion Quarterly 16, 1952: pp. 42-58.

17. "Social Norms, Imagery and Interpersonal Relations," In Search of Identity: The Japanese Overseas Scholar in America and Japan, edited by John Bennett, Herbert Passin and Robert K. McKnight. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958, pp. 225-239.

They developed a cultural model of interaction with several categories from the Japanese interpersonal norms. Following Ruth Benedict's lead they identified several general features of the Japanese norm, among which were articulate codification of rules, primary associative qualities, hierarchy, concern for status, relative permanence of status, and behavioral reserve and discipline. Such studies tend to identify certain concepts for intercultural communication on the international level, and to provide a rationale for cross-cultural communication between diplomats and statesmen. Although significant, these studies of culture and communication are scarcely concerned with the dimension of cross-cultural which can be viewed intra-nationally.

A multi-ethnic nation is also a nation of several cultures, which means that communication may well be across cultural lines when we think it is not, because we have been educated to perceive a homogeneous society. Although blacks comprise the largest single minority group in America, there are millions of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, thousands of Asian-Americans and numerous American Indians, plus other distinct ethnic groups. Communication between these groups and the larger, white society is the greatest barrier to multi-ethnic harmony. Unable to view the problem as cultural, the white society might often wonder what is wrong with plain American English that Blacks, Chicanos and other groups cannot accept. Of course, there may be nothing wrong with the white person's language, or for that matter, with the minority persons; they could conceivably be on different wavelengths because of cultural dissimilarity.

Time

Edward Hall says that time speaks more plainly than words and is subject to less distortion than spoken language.[18] How we approach time says a great deal about our interpersonal communication. Furthermore, it is difficult to hide our concepts of time. Most Americans, by which I mean white Americans, have developed a highly commercial concept of time. On the other hand, Black Americans tend to have a more "hang loose" attitude toward time. Because of these differences, transracial communication between blacks and whites often demands that the participants in interpersonal interactions understand each other's special perspective on time.

The commercial concept of time is most prevalent in American society. Unquestionably there are many minority people who share this general American perspective on time. It is not unusual for people within this society to suggest by language usage

18. The Silent Language, p. 15.

their high premium on temporality. Thus, when someone is behind schedule he seeks to "make time," and in this connection time becomes a commodity to be appropriated for his particular use. There is also the suggestion that one can "lose time," something no one wants to do. But if you "lose time" you might try to "buy time" by engaging in "time-saving" activities. Even the supermarkets advertise products as "time-savers" as well as "wife-savers," and then there are the careless people who "waste time" as the frivolous waste money. Clearly, our language is replete with commercial references to time.

Time can be treated cavalierly among Americans of non-European origin. This is one demonstration of the failure of the melting pot theory. But to say that blacks have a traditionally hang loose attitude toward time is not to make a judgment about the value of conforming to the general American conception of time. The distinctions of one concept of time are not more correct or more right than those of another. Each has its basis and its utility. Hall illustrates the time differential between American Indians and white Americans by telling of a Christmas dance he attended at an Indian pueblo near the Rio Grande.[19] Arriving at one o'clock in the wintry morning at seven thousand feet above sea level, he kept searching for clues as to when the dance would begin. Few whites had gathered in the church to await the dance, but many minutes passed; some people said, "There is no way of telling when they will start." "Last year I heard they started at ten o'clock."

According to Hall, when an Indian entered the church and poked up the fire in the stove, the whites thought the dance was about to begin. Another hour passed and another Indian entered the consistory and disappeared through the door at the rave. Suddenly when the whites were almost exhausted, the dance began.

Among Black Americans one can see a similar attitude toward time when it comes to recreation and fun. A colleague of mine at a university threw a big dance party for twenty to twenty-five couples, whites and blacks. The party had been announced for nine o'clock in the evening, but at nine o'clock a very interesting situation was developing. By nine thirty most of the whites has shown, only one black couple had appeared. The host and hostess began wondering if the blacks were boycotting the party, after all there had been much talk in the air about integration and separation. One or two more black couples arrived at ten o'clock; by this time all the invited whites were present. Whites began to talk in small voices about the absence of black faculty members at the party, and another hour passed. Around eleven fifteen the party took on a markedly changed complexion, and by twelve midnight, when some whites were thinking of leaving, the party had begun in earnest. Interestingly enough, those blacks who arrived late made no effort to apologize; they had simply been operating on A. P. (African people) time.

19. Ibid, pp. 21-22.

Another example of this "hang loose" concept of time occurred a few years ago when a baby shower was given for a pregnant Nigerian mother by one of her Afro-American friends. In this instance only one white person had been invited; the remainder of the guests were black. Invitations had requested the guests at six o'clock in the evening. When six o'clock arrived only the white girl and the hostess were at the shower. Engaging in light conversation, the hostess and white guest tried to find something to do while they waited. Around six-thirty the guest of honor phoned to say she would be a little late because she had stopped to pick up a prescription at the pharmacy. At seven o'clock the black guests had begun to arrive, and by seven thirty the guest of honor appeared. The shower was a success for friendships and the expected baby. The guests who felt the urge to explain mentioned things like, "I had to feed the family," "My mother wanted to come, so I gave her a ride," and "My neighbor wanted me to drive her to the store just as I was to leave." Other guests felt no need to explain primarily because there are two sides to the hang loose concept of time. One is definitely humanistic; the other has to do with the grand entrances. To appear on time is an indication of low-status, particularly for a festive event, such as a baby shower. To receive the attention of others, one must arrive after their arrival. So two currents operate in the hang loose concept: (1) priority belongs to the significant work I am now doing, and (2) only low-status persons attend festive events according to the announced time.

Misunderstandings in transracial communication can often occur when whites, possessing a commercial concept of time, encounter a black person whose cavalier attitude about time transcends the boundaries of recreation to those more sacred sectors of society. Unable to see why there should be any cultural differences in our distinctions of time, the white is liable to speak of the black person as irresponsible. On the other hand, black people often have a higher premium upon quality than efficiency. Evidence of this can be seen in lifestyle as well as in literature about blacks. It is often inconceivable to whites that blacks barely above the poverty level would want to drive second-hand Chryslers and Cadillacs. Such cars even if they do not function properly, still represent the appearance of quality. But this is another argument. The point to be made presently is that blacks would much rather perform well than perform on time. Priorities in the home or community might well keep a black person from making an appointment with an important businessman. There is in this cultural concept of time something which black writers have referred to as a humanistic approach to life.[20] Of course, both blacks and whites need to understand each other's concept of time if communication insensitivity is to be avoided. But time is only one dimension of the cultural differences which exist between American

20. The artistic and literary works of blacks such as Leroi Jones, Don Lee, and Nikki Giovanni attest to the humanistic approach to life. They argue that blacks in politics, art, religion, and science are inclined toward humanism.

people intra-nationally. Let us now turn to another dimension of American culture approaching its discussion as we have the dimension of time, with an eye toward understanding, which is the substance of communication.

Family

It has often been argued by persons of various social, religious and political persuasions that the family is the basic unit of societal organization; in fact, the argument establishes the family as the smallest institution within the society. This view is held by most Americans whether they be black, yellow, brown, or white. It is an insight almost accepted a priori. There can be little refutation of this fundamental view of the family. What, then, is the question of this unit? While the family is generally perceived as the basic unit in American society, what constitutes the family varies from group to group.

Blacks tend to have a more extended concept of the family than do whites. This is evident on several different levels of interaction in the black community. Consider the elaborate use of the terms "brother" and "sister" which indicates a filial relationship among black people. To be a "brother" or "sister" is to share with the communicator a special relationship to the world. As the family unit stands in a unique relationship to society's other institutions, so the extended family of the black person is a unit conceived in uniqueness. Thus, when blacks meet each other on the streets or at colleges, the greetings are often, "How's it going, brother?" "Stick in there, sister," or similar expressions showing one person's propinquity to another. While it would be impossible to actually demonstrate blood relationship with the persons identified as "brother" or "sister," the communicator and respondent perceive the special relationship and in discussion with a third party about the meeting both might indicate this common bond by another word. Merely giving a narrative, one of the participants in the interactive event where "brother" or "sister" was used, might say to a third party, "I met this blood today who had just come from Vietnam." Blood sends the same message as "brother" and "sister" while at the same time placing a more physical quality on the relationship. Other terms used to refer to other blacks which have been current are "skin" and "member," again demonstrating kinship.

At another level, the term "mother" can be used to indicate the special place an older woman within the black community has come to hold. There are "mothers of the church," "community mothers" and other women with "mother" attached to their names by respectful members of the community. As an extension of one's own family the black person sees others as his brothers, sisters, mothers and even occasionally fathers. Such a conception of family is difficult to find within the white community. Thus, in

transracial communication when the non-black communicator understands the nature of the black man's family, more valid conclusions can be drawn about black life and values. To be black in America is to have the largest family in the world, so say two prominent black psychiatrists.[21]

Interventions

How do we effectively build a bridge from one cultural bank to another? In other words, what interventions can be made which will sufficiently contain intra-national cultural values for improved communication? The answer to these questions will provide us with a fundamental re-orientation toward society and our fellow men. Our transracial communication behaviors are sustained and reinforced by a variety of cultural influences. Perception of time, concept of family and other more subtle dimensions of cultural differentiation between ethnic or racial groups tend to isolate one group from another. A proficient employment of intervention techniques requires a better understanding of the problems relating to the cultural differentiation in a multi-ethnic society.

First, to be able to provide effective interventions we must understand the nature of our society. There can be few things worse than a physician giving a remedy before he has made a diagnosis. Once we have made the proper diagnosis, the nature of our interventions may then be carefully elaborated to provide us with direction.

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21. William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, Black Rage. New York: Basic Books, 1968, passim.

STRUCTURE OF TRANSRACIAL COMMUNICATION

Form and Content

Transracial communication, like all communication, is manifest as both form and content. And the constraints upon the communication in other dimensions are also a transracial communication. There are a limited number of structural possibilities with communication. The more important ones can be included under the broad heading of interpersonal and mass. As inter-behavior based upon verbal interaction, the communication process can manifest itself in dyads, the smallest transactional group or in the larger intergroup experience. To speak of structure is also to include what is said; in fact, the what helps determine the how of interracial communication. But this must not be construed as referring only to the structurization, the form and content in detail, but to the anatomy of the structure in the large. A message, that which is specifically and purposely communicated, is structurization; the external anatomy of that message is what we mean by structure.

Human beings more often engage in dyadic than mass communication. Whether it is our conversations with immediate family members, messengers, retail clerks or a college president, a roommate, class officers or our professors, our communication is basically dyadic. There will, of course, be those times when we will give speeches or hear speeches in a mass meeting and there will also be times when we will interact in groups, but dyadic, one-to-one, communication is the most prevalent form of human interaction.

Transracial contexts do not significantly alter the basic structure of the interchange except when the psychological constraints on the participants mean that some changes in communication content occur as a result of our perceptions. In this way our perceptions, based upon past experiences and external influences, are directly responsible for our structurizations. All communication is colored by perceptions of reality and if perceptions are built upon stereotypes or other psychological constraints, the communication structurization is affected. When a white person perceives a black person as "inferior" the kind of communication structurization produced by the white person reflects his image of the black. To see the black person as "inferior" means that the communication message will not reveal any egalitarian intentions. By the same token, when, say, blacks see the police as "pigs" the structurization will manifest this perception. Language is a product of our culture, experiences and stereotypes; and no miracles are worked in interracial communication. Let us now see how the various transracial situations manifest the structure of communication.

Dyadic transracial situations can reveal a complex system of messages and countermessages which increase and decrease in difficulty proportional to the communicator's willingness to communicate. When two persons of dissimilar ethnic backgrounds engage in conversation, they frequently bring into play patterns of positive or negative reinforcement which aid in controlling the other's communication behavior. It may seem unlikely that our communication activity can be controlled and manipulated by another in a dyadic setting. But it is not unlikely at all; in fact it happens in most double-member communication situations. Sometimes we are the manipulated and at other times we manipulate. One study has shown that a psychotherapist can control what a patient verbalizes by controlling reinforcement contingencies.[22] This can be accomplished by the way the psychotherapist nods his head and gives other signs. In such a case the patient does not have to know that he is being controlled. Similarly, in double-member communication settings the communicators control each other, occasionally with one person dominating. But the effectiveness of communication under these circumstances depends in part on the willingness of the parties to engage in transracial communication. Unwillingness to enter into transracial communication results in a higher degree of complexity involving messages and countermessages as the communicators try to outwit or "get the best" of each other. As we know by now this is not the way to increase interpersonal communication transracially or otherwise.

Qualities Affecting Structure

The person who engages in interpersonal communication must possess a willingness to communicate combined with accessibility to the other person. There are some situations which demand certain requirements; interpersonal communication in transracial contexts is one. Willingness means that the potential communicator is not merely indifferent to the communication event, but is actively interested in what is being communicated by source and message. If we refused to demonstrate willingness to engage in conversation, the prospects for meaningful interaction would be bleak indeed. This is to say that all technical systems, i.e., communication channels, cognitive factors, and receiving organs, might be functioning properly and yet fail to have significant interaction.

To be willing is to be sensitive to other people. Willingness is not merely applicable to transracial communication, it is a cardinal rule of all communication. Parents often have difficulty with sullen children who will not reveal why they are angry. College students who share dormitory or apartment rooms with others have frequently found that their roommate "does not want

22. L. Krasner, "Studies of the Conditioning of Verbal Behavior," Psychological Bulletin 55, 1958: pp. 148-170.

to talk about it." "It" could be a multitude of things from a break-up with a lover to a poor grade in communication theory. But in both these instances and numerous similar ones, what is clear is that the non-communicative person is unwilling to talk with parents or friends, and at that point lacks the essential sensitivity required for meaningful interaction.

Propinquity

Implied in willingness is an attempt to become accessible to the other person. Defense mechanisms which prevent one person from interacting with another should be controlled by an active resistance to provincialism. Most defense mechanisms to transracial communication are based upon preconceived notions about the other person. "I don't want to communicate with you because blacks and whites have nothing to talk about," is a commonly held attitude among non-communicative persons. On the basis of this attitude, avoidance becomes the game of the day in an effort to evade interaction. Clearly, availability is lacking and no communication can be achieved if we are not accessible to each other. Sometimes past experiences and childhood prejudices color our outlook so that transracial communication is nearly impossible. Seeking to avoid persons of other ethnic or racial groups, some persons have been known to exit by rear doors when in an auditorium or to frown when passing a member of another race. These, of course, are extreme cases. Most non-communicative people simply do not get themselves involved in transracial situations by avoiding the schools, stores, neighborhoods, and churches where this cross-cultural interaction is liable to take place.

But anyone seeking transracial communication must become available to the other person. Two persons may have the desire and willingness to communicate but never do so because they have never been available. There are definite limits to how far the human voice can reach, how far the human eye can see, and how far the human ear can detect sound. Such limitations serve to augment the necessity for propinquity between transracial communicators. However, we should not be misled into believing that mere physical proximity means availability. Proximity is only one part of accessibility; the other part involves the flexibility and sensitivity of the two persons. If they are in proximity and are sensitive to each other in the sense of being able to anticipate responses, attitudes and judgments, then availability exists. It cannot exist in the absence of sensitivity or propinquity.

Both willingness and availability are crucial to transracial communication and as qualities which affect the nature of the structurization occupy key positions in this construct of interpersonal communication. What is said is frequently determined by how available the next guy is at a given time and what is communicated as a message is dependent upon our willingness to accept it.

While these may not be the only influences in the transracial communicator's messages, they are certainly the most critical.

Task Appreciation

All structurizations reflect specific tasks under consideration by the communicators. In transracial communication, task appreciation means an attitude sensitive to the solution or resolution of a given problem involving race or ethnic relations. Sensitivity to each other provides the transracial communication with a measure of problem of anticipation but only under the heat of genuine problems or issues dealing with race can task appreciation be adequately evaluated. In such instances, the communicators must perform together, and performing together is not the same as being sensitive to a person. In performance, that is, joint task resolution or solution, the transracial communicators must deal with a different level of interpersonal relations. Under pressure of task resolution, they come to do together what they may have doubted they could do before--even if it is to argue honestly and freely.

When two persons of different racial backgrounds engage in serious discussion of an issue related to race they are likely to create a communicative experience two persons of the same race never could or, perhaps, never would. Because it is so easy for members of the same ethnic group to agree with each other or to "understand" exceedingly quickly, if only superficially, what the other person is saying, there may be little likelihood of honest interaction. On the other hand, transracial communication tends to produce persons who will take sides aggressively to defend an ethnic perspective and not so easily give it up. In addition, if there is some agreement between the persons of different ethnic backgrounds, they tend to dismiss issues related to other races much more lightly than persons of that race is likely to do. Therefore, transracial communication produces a new creative experience by giving the communicators an opportunity to become sensitive to the resolution and solution of problems related to race.

Normalization

In most communication situations, speaker and listener seek to normalize interpersonal relations. Some interactive events are primarily concerned with "crisis" situations; others are more given to casual conversation. But in either case, whether the communicators are attempting to arrive at agreement out of controversy or merely wanting to interact verbally with each other, normalization is being sought.

In terms of transracial communication, normalization means that the communicators are seeking a stage in their interaction

where they can appear to each other without affectation. Affectation is the plague of much interpersonal communication and is especially detrimental to transracial communication. Sometimes affectation in communication happens almost subconsciously and at other times it is a planned activity. In both cases it must be considered an unworthy condition for effective communication.

Consider the impossibility of two persons of different races to communicate in earnest because they're "putting each other on" acting as if they are honest, when, in fact, they are not. There are many reasons for this kind of action, one might well be that the communicators feel that in order to maintain another person's friendship or more likely acquaintance, it is necessary to conceal one's true feelings about pertinent matters. Consider for a moment the communication situation in which a black and white student are talking about the low demand for Ph.D.'s in physics today. Somewhere in the conversation, the white person refers to the black as "Negro" and then meekly says, "Excuse me, I didn't intend to use that word, it slipped." The white student need not go through the agony of explaining what he meant by the term, "Negro." While the term is held in disfavor by blacks, it does not always call for apologies. A more vivid example of the lack of candor is demonstrated when the black person responds positively to questions put to him about the political situation or a white person refuses to call a black "incompetent" because of repercussions. The black may interpret the remark as racial in nature and reply to the white by calling him a "racist." Such a situation can, of course, be racial in nature and many times the communicators may be using their stereotypical impressions but this is not necessarily so. Both "incompetent" and "racist" are strong words evoking intense emotional feelings.

Two principles are involved in the process of normalization in transracial communication. The first is the principle of social-symbol reproducibility; the second is the principle of linguistic regularity. According to the principle of social-symbol reproducibility, whenever persons of different ethnic or racial groups interact verbally the normalization process occurs in proportion to the length of time they interact. Put another way, the more time persons of different racial or ethnic backgrounds spend in communication with each other, the less difficulty in unaffected perception of the other. In addition, this condition is reproducible in any society with two or more ethnic groups. Initial contact between persons of different ethnic backgrounds, especially if they are strangers, mutually sharing negative stereotypes of one another, tends to provoke "sizing up" of each other. While this situation can be reproduced in most societies, the normalization process which occurs with length of communication is also reproducible. Having made this statement, I do not suggest that the degree of normalization will be the same in every society. Obviously, lifelong racists would have an extremely difficult time normalizing their communication with persons of the despised or hated race

in one hour of interaction. Indeed, what is being developed here is more significant and more complex than mere talk. Few can doubt that, say, whites and blacks have "talked" to or at each other in some sections of the country for hundreds of years with little or no meaningful changes in racial attitudes. So it is not mere talk that is meant when I argue that normalization occurs in proportion to the length of verbal interaction. To theorize in this manner is not to contend that there will be racial agreement or even racial harmony. As I have indicated, normalization means that the communicators will lose their affected manner.

Now with the principle of social-symbol reproducibility in mind, let us turn to the principle of linguistic regularity. In a given dyadic interpersonal communication situation, certain words which are used are more mutually understandable to both communicators than others. The word "booty" has several meanings and in a transracial communication situation between blacks and whites, "Get your booty out of my way" could possibly produce a blind spot for the white listener who was not privy to the word's meaning in the black community. Similarly, a white communicator could conceivably use what to him is an exceptionally common name for a food or house appliance which might not be understood by his black listener. Much transracial communication totters on the ladder of mutual linguistic understanding. These difficulties are not inevitable, but we can usually recall one or two instances in our own experience where we wondered what the other person was saying or meaning. The currency of Yiddish words in today's society also leads to a new learning experience and those who have not grasped "chutzpah" can have blind spots in their communication.

Of course, to some extent we all have had occasion to "not know" and yet be able to understand the sense of a statement, sentence or speech. In fact, while our reading vocabulary is probably more extensive than our speaking vocubulary there are times when we are not sure of the meaning of a word in a text, yet we understand the paragraph because of context. Needless to say, this situation is constantly being created in interpersonal communication. Our "un-huh's" and shaking heads do not necessarily indicate total understanding of every word uttered; they might merely mean that we understand the drift of what is being said by the speaker. Words can only become "known" to us after we have heard them used and have used them ourselves in various contexts; indeed, the correct use of a word, vocally or written, is a cognitive process.

It is now convenient and possible for us to say that the principle of linguistic regularity contends that the process of normalization in transracial communication occurs more readily in those instances where the communicators regularly share a common language code. In addition, the fewer the linguistic irregularities shared by the communicators, the greater the probability of transracial normalization. Human beings are inclined toward normal

relations with those who hold to beliefs, customs, and language habits similar to their own. Therefore, through social-symbol reproducibility and the attempt at linguistic regularity, human beings can achieve a high degree of communication across ethnic lines.

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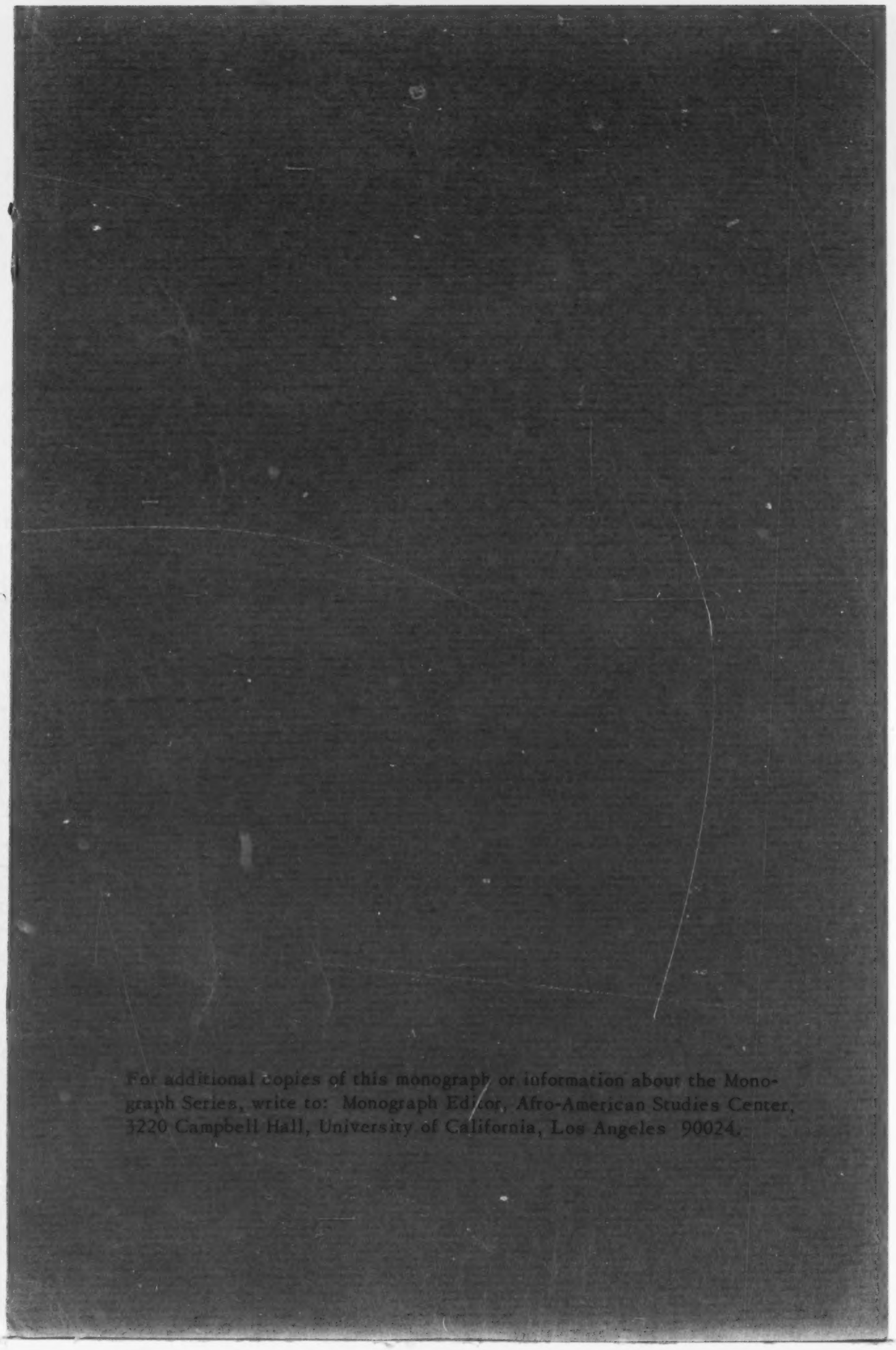

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